



Office of
Environment
& Heritage

Our reference: MD12/3455

Dr Chris Watson
Ginninderra Falls Association
79 Denny Street
LATHAM ACT 2605

Dear Dr Watson

I refer to your letter to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Robyn Parker MP, regarding a proposal to establish a new national park on the NSW/ACT border. The Minister referred your letter to the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), and I am replying on her behalf.

Similar correspondence from the ACT on this issue has been received recently by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), part of OEH, and I am aware of the organised community support for this proposal.

NPWS receives many proposals each year to purchase private property for addition to the national parks system. NPWS only considers purchasing property on the open market, or where direct offers of sale have been made from the land owner. I understand that, in this circumstance, many parcels of private land would be required to be purchased to realise the proposal to establish the Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park.

If land is offered or available for purchase, NPWS undertakes a rigorous process of assessment at both state-wide and regional levels to determine if the conservation values of the land warranting reservation as a national park, and whether the land aligns with strategic priorities for reservation. The NSW Government's current reserve acquisition priorities are focussed on areas of high conservation value that establish corridors across the landscape. The land in question does not appear to be a critical link in any particular conservation corridor.

In a constrained budget, even lands that meet all these criteria have to be considered against many competing demands for acquisition funds. The significance of park establishment and ongoing management costs are also factors in making decisions about which land to purchase.

I understand that the former private tourist facility on this land was closed after several injuries to visitors made it unviable to obtain appropriate insurance. If the NSW Government was to purchase the land and open it as a national park, it would bear the cost of making it safe as well as funding ongoing management costs. Given the proximity of the land to the northern suburbs of Canberra, it is likely that a majority of the beneficiaries of such a recreational facility would be ACT residents.

Notwithstanding these issues, I acknowledge the conservation values and recreational opportunities of the land in question.

I can advise that the Minister, on behalf of the Premier, has written to the ACT Chief Minister, Ms Katy Gallagher MLA, on this matter. Solutions other than the establishment of a new NSW national park may be able to achieve many of the outcomes sought by the community groups. For example, a formal Conservation Agreement under the NSW *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* may help achieve the desired protection of the area's natural and cultural values. I also note the interest of Yass Shire Council and consider there may be a possible role for the private sector in offering recreational opportunities.

Senior regional officers of NPWS will be contacting their counterparts in the ACT Government to explore such options. In the meantime, if you have further queries you may wish to contact Ms Julie Crawford, NPWS Area Manager, Queanbeyan, telephone 02 6229 7054.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Dunnett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

GARY DUNNETT
A/Director Metropolitan and Mountains
National Parks and Wildlife Service

5/9/2012